

Committee on Ways and Means

H.R. 5865, the *Returned Americans Protection Act of 2006*

Bill Summary and Background

Summary of Legislation

- Section 1 provides the short title.
- Section 2 amends Title 11 of the Social Security Act to temporarily (through the end of FY 2006) lift the current \$1 million cap on the “Assistance for U.S. Citizens Returned from Foreign Countries” repatriation program to help meet the need for temporary assistance of U.S. citizens returning to the U.S. due to the current situation in Lebanon.
- Section 3 requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General to report to Congress on how program funds are spent for this purpose.
- Section 4 continues the underlying program through the end of FY 2007, ensuring a full year for Congressional oversight and opportunity for reauthorization as well as providing savings to cover the costs associated with the current repatriation from Lebanon.
- The legislation is estimated to be cost-neutral, as scored by CBO.

Background on the Repatriation Program

The repatriation program is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It provides temporary assistance to U.S. citizens who return to the U.S. if they are (1) certified by the U.S. Department of State as having returned, or been brought, from a foreign country to the U.S. because of destitution, illness, war, threat of war, invasion, or similar crisis, and (2) without available resources. The program is supported by Federal mandatory funds, limited to \$1 million per year.

Primary reasons for an individual utilizing repatriation include lack of funds, medical crises, psychiatric/emotional problems, war, marital problems, and arrests. The temporary assistance can be provided for up to 90 days and may include money payments, medical care, temporary billeting, transportation, and other goods and services necessary for the health or welfare of individuals. The statute authorizing the program suggests that support is provided in the form of a loan, although repayment rates for such “loans” recently have been as low as 2 percent; it is possible that individuals who repatriate from Lebanon may repay program “loans” at a higher rate. States, Federal agencies, and local organizations (including the Red Cross in the current episode) help throughout the process of providing services to individuals served under this program. In addition, the program pays for State costs associated with making caseworkers available at points of entry, as well as security, rental, telephone, and other administrative costs.

During FY2003 – 2005, assistance was provided to approximately 500 individuals. Client costs in 2005 were \$249,712 while administrative and other program costs totaled \$650,289.

HHS expects to serve between 8,000 and 15,000 U.S. citizens repatriating from Lebanon - requiring an immediate increase in the current \$1 million program ceiling, which will be reached early in the week of July 24.